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ABSTRACT

The study examines results of an anonymous poll of student attitudes and participation in demonstrations and riots at the University of Maryland. The poll was administered to 1407 university students and data are presented by means, standard deviations, and factor analysis. Results indicate that students generally feel that demonstrations are worthwhile ways to express strong feelings concerning social problems. However, students did not favor rioting or actions stronger than demonstrations. The authors feel that colleges and universities must take bold stands through attitudes and actions on social issues or the gap between many students and their schools will remain and perhaps widen. They feel that direct concern with societal change by administration and faculty can prevent future demonstrations and riots. References are included. (Author/SES)

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PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE?

Anne M. Collins and William E. Sedlacek

Research Report # 11-72

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SUMMARY

An anonymous poll on student attitudes and participation in demonstrations and riots was administered to 1407 freshmen and upperclassmen. Data were presented by means, standard deviations, and a factor analysis. The results show that students generally feel that demonstrations are worthwhile to point out social problems about which they feel strongly. They are generally not in favor of rioting or actions stronger than demonstrations. However, the factor analyses show that attitudes toward demonstrations and participation in them are distinct and uncorrelated. The implications seem to be that students still feel strongly about social issues and their value, but relatively few are going to put those attitudes into action. Results of other studies (e.g., Schmidt and Sedlacek, 1971) indicate that it will likely take a regularly scheduled event such as a national moratorium on the war, as in 1969, or a dramatic announcement such as the U.S. invasion of Cambodia in 1970 to encourage large numbers of students to demonstrate or riot. The writers feel that unless colleges and universities are prepared to take bold and forthright stands through attitudes and actions on social issues such as war, racism, poverty and militarism, the gap between many students and their schools will remain and perhaps widen. Schools should lead social change movements, not begrudgingly follow after student have resorted to demonstrations and riots to make their point. Demonstrations and riots have been a part of our past, and conditions seem likely to produce them in the present; and unless university administrators, faculty and student leaders become more directly involved in societal change, demonstrations and riots likely will be part of our future.

Student dissent has been a continuing source of concern to many Americans on and off college campuses. Changes in the "New Left" occur so rapidly that research on student dissent becomes dated almost before it is published.

An additional problem in researching student activism is that of anonymity. Student activists are reluctant to cooperate with data-gathering attempts because of their fear of political or academic repercussions. Because of this fear, most data on activism must be collected anonymously and compilation of the demographic characteristics of the activist student is difficult.

Researchers have found that a few demographic characteristics seem consistently present in several different samples of the population. Most activist students appear to come from families in the upper-middle income bracket (Westby & Braungart, 1966; Flacks, 1967a; Astin, 1968), to be more intelligent than the average college student (Bay, 1970; Kerpelman, 1969; Gales, 1966; Westley and Epstein, 1969), and to be the children of well educated parents who have established liberal, non-authoritarianism atmospheres in their homes (Flacks, 1967a, 1967b; Watts and Whittaker, 1966; Astin, 1968; and Keniston, 1968). In a study of participants in the 1970 disturbances at the University of Maryland, Kimball and Sedlacek (1971) found that participants were more likely to be upperclassmen, to regard themselves as more liberal or radical and to come from families with higher incomes than non-participants. However, O'Connell and Sedlacek (1971), in a study on prediction of student political views, found no correlation between class, family income and political activity. Since demonstrations and riots appear to have reached their peak in 1969-70, a natural question is are demonstrations and riots a thing of the past?; and if so, why?; and what other tactics for social change are likely to be employed? The purpose of this study was to examine these and related demographic and attitudinal variables.

Method

The subjects were students at the University of Maryland, College Park, who completed an anonymous poll on attitudes and participation in demonstrations and riots. Six hundred twenty-one new freshmen took the poll during Summer Orientation in 1971. Another 786 students (mostly sophomores, juniors and seniors) took the poll during September, 1971 registration. All subjects were selected by an approximately random procedure. The two groups were combined since they did not differ significantly from one another (χ^2 at .01 level). Means and standard deviations were reported, and a principal components factor analysis, using squared multiple correlations as communality estimates, was conducted on the combined groups. All factors with eigenvalues greater than one were rotated to a varimax solution. Responses of "other" or "unknown" were dropped from the analysis.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows that students most strongly agreed that: demonstrations are an effective way to get people to listen (item 13), demonstrations help participants renew faith in a cause (item 14), demonstrations or rallies help disseminate information on issues (item 19), I am more radical than I used to be (item 10). Students most strongly disagreed that : change can occur only if our current government is overthrown (item 8), I am tired of being concerned with social problems (item 9), I like things pretty much the way they are in the society (item 18) and I plan to avoid getting involved in controversial issues (item 20).

Table 2 shows the results of the factor analysis. Two factors accounted for 100% of the common variance. The factors were labeled Attitudes Toward Demonstrations, and Participation in Riots or Demonstrations. The results show that students generally feel that demonstrations are worthwhile to point out

social problems about which they feel strongly. They are generally not in favor of rioting or actions stronger than demonstrations. However, the factor analyses show that attitudes toward demonstrations and participation in them are distinct and uncorrelated. The implications seem to be that students still feel strongly about social issues and their value but relatively few are going to put those attitudes into action. Results of other studies (e.g., Schmidt and Sedlacek, 1971) indicated that it will likely take a regularly scheduled event such as a national moratorium on the war, as in 1969, or a dramatic announcement such as the U.S. invasion of Cambodia in 1970 to encourage large numbers of students to demonstrate or riot. The writers feel that unless colleges and universities are prepared to take bold and forthright stands through attitudes and actions on social issues such as the war, racism, poverty, and militarism, the gap between many students and their schools will remain and perhaps widen. Schools should lead social change movements, not begrudgingly follow after students have resorted to demonstrations and riots to make their point. Demonstrations and riots have been a part of our past, and conditions seem likely to produce them in the present; and unless university administrators, faculty, and student leaders become more directly involved in societal change, demonstrations and riots likely will be part of our future.

Table 1.
Means* and Standard Deviations on Attitude Items

Item	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>
8. Riots do more good than demonstrations.	4.17	1.00
9. I am tired of being concerned with social problems.	3.93	0.99
10. I am more radical than I used to be.	2.70	1.17
11. Demonstrations are mostly social occasions for participants.	2.89	1.07
12. Demonstrators should be made to pay for any damage or extra expenses (e.g., extra police) they cause.	2.86	1.24
13. Demonstrations are an effective way to get people to listen.	2.57	1.00
14. Demonstrations help participants renew faith in a cause.	2.66	1.04
16. Change can occur only if our current government is overthrown.	4.20	0.99
17. I am frustrated at my lack of power to cause societal change.	2.89	1.14
18. I like things pretty much the way they are in the society.	3.75	0.97
19. Demonstrations or rallies help disseminate information on issues.	2.69	0.97
20. I plan to avoid getting involved in controversial issues.	3.58	1.01

* 1= Strongly agree - 5= Strongly disagree.

Table 2.

Items* Loading on Two Factors

Factor I

Attitude Toward Demonstrations

<u>Item</u>	<u>Loading</u>
Demonstrations are an effective way to get people to listen.	.62
Demonstrations help participants renew faith in a cause.	.60
Demonstrators should be made to pay for any damage or extra expenses (e.g., extra police) they cause.	-.52
I like things pretty much the way they are in the society.	-.49
I am frustrated at my lack of power to cause societal change.	.45

Factor II

Participation in Demonstrations or Riots

I participated in some way in a demonstration with the last year: 1,yes; 2, no.	.85
I participated in some way in a riot within the last year:1, yes; 2,no.	.52
I spent 24 hours or more in jail last year: 1, yes; 2,no.	.34
Riots do more good than demonstrations	.33
Change can only occur if our current government is overthrown	.33

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